

Fish Farming or Farming for Fish
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In Indiana, farmers are producing fish in two ways: directly through aquaculture and indirectly by using good soil and water conservation practices. With the help of state and federal programs, Indiana farmers are improving fish habitat in Glenn Flint Lake, West Boggs Lake, Big Walnut Creek, and in many other waterways across the state by switching to conservation tillage, planting streamside vegetation, and limiting livestock access to streams and lakes through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Murky water due to suspended silt and high phosphorus levels characterized Indiana lakes in the 1970s. Runoff of sediments and nutrients were contaminating lakes and reducing their worth for fish, wildlife, recreation, and property values. Over the past two decades, the Indiana Conservation Partnership (a team of state, federal, and local agencies, including the IDNR Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) program) has joined landowners to improve watersheds that drain to lakes and rivers, many of which contain important recreational fisheries.

By the early 1990s, monitoring conducted by the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) showed a tight relationship between lake water quality and regions of the state where farmers have improved their soil and water conservation practices. Over 75 percent of the lakes in some Indiana regions have improved in water quality within the last 20 years. In the hill country of southern Indiana, most reservoirs lay at the base of watersheds containing steep slopes and easily eroded soils - a landscape that can easily result in threats to water quality. However, these areas are gaining protection with high rates of conservation tillage and sensitive lands enrolled in conservation programs and showed above average water quality.

So, the next time you see a farm with green buffer strips along the stream and corn stalks on the ground in the winter, be sure to thank the farmer for their fish production!

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Data from: IDEM. 1996. Indiana Lake Water Quality Update for 1989-1993.
Clean Lakes Program, Indiana Department of Environmental Management,
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